

25/11/91

TC 4976

Lord Molloy: My Lords, is the Minister aware that many people do not know who forms the NEDC, and that sometimes people, such as the two I mentioned, can be frustrated? They must be the most vital people on the NEDC. Should not just those two be seen together from time to time with government representatives.

Lord Brabazon of Tara: My Lords, both the gentleman mentioned by the noble Lord are on the NEDC. They meet four times a year within the forum of the NEDC.

Lord Williams of Elvel: My Lords, the Minister seems to have few friends in the House today. Has he studied what Sir Clifford Chetwood, the chairman of Wimpeys, said to the Building Employers' Confederation this morning: that 5,000 companies in the industry will go bust this year; the industry is shockingly depressed; and things are getting worse? Will he concede the case put forward by my noble friend Lord Molloy, that it is time for the Government to invite the CBI and the TUC to serious talks on how to get the economy back on the road again?

Lord Brabazon of Tara: My Lords, the role of government is to create a climate in which the economy can thrive. To do that, we have brought inflation right down to 3.7 per cent.—much lower than it has been for a long time. We have a low-tax economy, and from those circumstances we expect to see the recovery continue.

Lord Williams of Elvel: My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for giving that reply, but has he studied the words of Sir Clifford Chetwood, who is not a member of the Labour Party but chairman of Wimpeys? He is talking about a major manufacturing industry in this country. What are the Minister and his government going to do about it?

Lord Brabazon of Tara: My Lords, we outlined what we are doing about it in debates on the Autumn Statement and the humble Address. I have not yet seen Sir Clifford Chetwood's remarks. No doubt I shall do so in due course.

Lord Stoddart of Swindon: My Lords, the Minister said that the recovery would continue. Will he tell us when it started?

Lord Brabazon of Tara: My Lords, technically, we came out of recession with the publication of the latest quarterly figures.

Lord Morris: My Lords, with regard to the reference to the absence of friends made by the noble Lord, Lord Williams, does my noble friend agree that there is a great deal more to friendship than asking questions?

Lord Brabazon of Tara: My Lords, obviously, and I am grateful to my noble friend for his support.

East Timor

2.58 p.m.

Baroness Ewart-Biggs asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether they will raise the issue of East Timor with the United Nations Security Council, and whether they will make urgent representations to the Indonesian Government in relation to their treatment of the East Timor people.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, (The Earl of Caithness): My Lords, representations were made to the Indonesian Ambassador on 13th November, and the European Community issued a statement the same day on recent incidents in East Timor. There are no plans to raise that issue with the UN Secretary-General.

Baroness Ewart-Biggs: My Lords, universal horror has been expressed at national and international level at the murder of innocent mourners at Dili. That incident is in line with a succession of brutalities committed by the Indonesians in East Timor since the illegal occupation in 1975. Will the Government support the Portuguese Government's proposal for an international, independent investigation? Will the Minister also say whether Her Majesty's Government will continue to trade arms to this brutal and repressive regime?

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, we believe that the best policy is the one which we are pursuing and that is to support the United Nations Secretary-General in his efforts to encourage Indonesia and Portugal to resolve their differences. We wish to see how the commission of inquiry which the Indonesian Government have set up develops. I also say to the noble Baroness that we understand clearly and are horrified by what has happened in the past. But our paramount concern is to deter any repetition in the future.

The Earl of Selkirk: My Lords, has Indonesia, either by law or history, the slightest claim to the lands of Timor?

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, I am sorry. I missed the first part of my noble friend's question because other people were speaking.

The Earl of Selkirk: My Lords, I repeat: does the noble Earl agree that the Indonesians have no claim either at law or through history to the lands of Timor?

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, I confirm that we have not recognised the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia, *de jure*. But I must point out to the House that, among others, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have done so.

Lord Ennals: My Lords, may we have an adequate answer to the question which has already been put from both sides of the House? Does the Minister agree that Britain has become one of the principal suppliers of arms since the invasion took place in 1975? It is intolerable that we are now in a sense conniving at the

terrible events that have occurred in East Timor. Will the Government take a firmer position than they have so far taken?

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, I certainly dispute the first point raised by the noble Lord about the answers that I have given. As he will be fully aware, all countries have a sovereign right under the United Nations charter to secure the means of their own defence. Applications to export British defence equipment are carefully scrutinised on a case by case basis. It is important to remember that we do not allow the export of arms and equipment likely to be used for repressive purposes against civil populations.

Lord Molloy: My Lords, is the noble Earl aware that while the Indonesian Government masquerade as a democracy, we read in all our substantial newspapers of the appalling, horrible crimes being committed in the name of democracy? When one examines it in detail, the crimes make Pol Pot look like a disillusioned boy scout. While we are discussing the subject this afternoon, probably 30 to 40 people during every hour for the next six months will be destroyed or brutally murdered by one of the most horrendous governments on earth.

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, if the noble Lord can justify his figures, I shall have a look at them.

Lord Hatch of Lusby: My Lords, is the noble Earl aware that last week Stephen Cox, the photographer who was present in Dili during the massacre of 12th November, was in this House and met some of us? Has he met representatives of the Foreign Office? If so, what action will the Foreign Office take about the assaults to which he was subjected over a period of two to three hours when he was confined to a cellar during the massacre? Following that, he was assaulted by the Indonesian defence forces.

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, Stephen Cox has not asked to see me but I can assure the noble Lord that I discussed all questions of human rights with the Indonesian Ambassador on 13th November. During my visit to Indonesia in May I discussed the subject with five different people.

Lord Rea: My Lords, as my noble friend Lady Ewart-Biggs said, this is only the end of a long line of terrible atrocities against the people of East Timor. I visited that country in 1989 as a member of an IPU delegation. In view of the latest atrocity, is it not time for Her Majesty's Government to take a more active role through the Security Council by imposing sanctions if necessary on, in particular, as other noble Lords have said, the sale of arms to Indonesia? Such action would be taken in order to persuade the Indonesians to comply with the two United Nations resolutions, Resolutions Nos. 384 and 389, which require Indonesia to withdraw its forces from East Timor, pending a plebiscite under international supervision to determine that country's future.

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, I seriously contest the allegation that the Government have done nothing. If the noble Lord has listened to me, he will

have heard me say that we took action immediately, the following day, with our European partners. As I have already said in a previous answer, we fully support the United Nations Secretary-General in his efforts to try to get Portugal and Indonesia to resolve their differences.

Lord Hatch of Lusby: My Lords, will the noble Earl answer my question? What action is the Foreign Office taking in view of the assault on a British citizen?

Lord Gridley: My Lords, may I ask my noble friend whether there are other nations in that area, including Malaysia and Australia, who belong to the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, who have every conceivable interest in what is going on? Of course, Her Majesty's Government have to take the interests of those parties into account.

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, I am grateful for my noble friend's question. All of us take a great interest in what is going on in Indonesia and we are appalled and horrified by the actions that took place on 12th November. My noble friend is quite right in saying that Australia recognises the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia. It is an important country and we should take note of its views.

Lord Hatch of Lusby: My Lords, will the noble Earl now answer my question? What action are the Foreign Office and the Government taking in view of the deliberate assaults made on a British citizen, Stephen Cox, on 12th November in Dili?

The Earl of Caithness: My Lords, I have already answered that question: I said that I had spoken to the Indonesian Ambassador about it.

European Council, Maastricht

3.6 p.m.

The Lord Privy Seal (Lord Waddington) rose to move, That this House takes note of the forthcoming negotiations at the European Council at Maastricht.

The noble Lord said: My Lords, two weeks from now the European Council will meet in Maastricht, a meeting which is set to decide issues crucial to the future of the European Community and for Britain's role in it.

Before looking to the future, it is worth reminding ourselves how far we have come. For a host of reasons—historical, geographical, political—we in Britain were slow to see the value of the Community or at least our membership of it and, even when we did, admittance was denied to us. I know that a number of noble Lords have strong views on British policy in those early years of the Community's existence. There is perhaps not a great deal of point in raking over that ground again now. But the fact of the matter is that when we did join the Community, after intensive negotiations in which my noble friend Lord Rippon played a distinguished part, it was an organisation which certainly had not been framed by its original members in order to suit us. This inevitably meant that in the early years of our membership repeated attempts were made to modernise the structure and